



# Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program

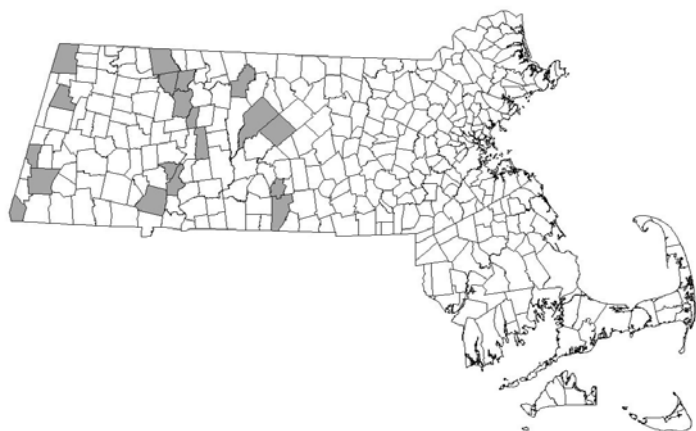
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**Description:** Purple Clematis (*Clematis occidentalis*) is a graceful, woody vine of sub-acid rocky slopes and outcrops. A member of the buttercup family (Ranunculaceae), it has opposite or whorled leaves and pendant bluish or purple flowers that bloom from May to June.

**Aids to identification:** Purple Clematis has a trailing or climbing stem that grows to a length of 6 feet (2 m). The leaves are opposite or whorled, and compound with three long-stalked leaflets. The leaflets are egg shaped (ovate) and may be slightly toothed or entire. They are about 1.6 to 3 inches (4–7.5 cm) long, and 1 to 2 inches (2.5–5 cm) wide. The flowers originate from the leaf axils, are solitary, and have four bluish to purplish petaloid sepals. The sepals are about 1.4 inches (3.5 cm) in length. The fruit is an achene (dry, one-seeded), and forms within a dense, conspicuous feathery head from July to September.

**Similar species:** Purple Clematis most resembles the Virgin's Bower (*Clematis virginiana*), however this species has white flowers within a panicle (a branched cluster of flowers) originating from the leaf axils, rather than solitary, purple flowers. Also, the leaflets of Virgin's Bower are coarsely toothed, while those of Purple Clematis are entire to irregularly lobed



## Purple Clematis *Clematis occidentalis*

State Status: **Special Concern**  
Federal Status: **None**



Gleason, H.A. 1952. *The New Britton and Brown Illustrated Flora of the Northeastern United States and Adjacent Canada*. Published for the NY Botanical Garden by Hafner Press. New York.

**Habitat in Massachusetts:** Purple Clematis inhabits mesic to dry, semi-shaded, steep areas of calcareous or circumneutral rocky outcrops, talus, and cliff areas. The vine trails along the ground on rocky slopes and ledges, or climbs vertically on supporting trees and shrubs. Associated plant species include White Ash (*Fraxinus americana*), Sugar Maple (*Acer saccharum*), Wild Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*), and Climbing Fumitory (*Adlumia fungosa*) (Special Concern).

**Threats:** Purple Clematis requires filtered sun exposure; therefore, forest maturation and canopy closure, resulting from a lack of natural or anthropogenic disturbance, may over-shade the plant. Invasive exotic plant species may over-shade or out-compete Purple Clematis at some sites. Habitats along trails may be threatened by trampling damage.

### Flowering time in Massachusetts

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec

**Range:** The range of Purple Clematis is broad, extending across all of southern Canada; in the eastern states the range extends from Maine south to North Carolina and west to Ohio; in the Midwest from Minnesota to Michigan, south to Illinois; and in the western states, Montana to Washington, south to Colorado. Purple Clematis is rare in several states and provinces, including Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Virginia, West Virginia, Wisconsin, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Saskatchewan; its status is under review in several other states. It is historically known from Delaware and Ohio.

**Population status in Massachusetts:** Purple Clematis is listed under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act as a species of Special Concern. All listed species are legally protected from killing, collection, possession, or sale, and from activities that would destroy habitat and thus directly or indirectly cause mortality or disrupt critical behaviors. Purple Clematis is currently known from Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, Hampshire, and Worcester Counties, and is historically known from Middlesex County.

**Management recommendations:** As with many rare species, the exact management needs of Purple Clematis are not known. Sites should be monitored for over-shading caused by forest succession, and for invasive plant species. Habitat sites that do not receive enough light can be managed with canopy thinning or prescription burning. If trampling or erosion are threats in recreational areas, trails can be stabilized or re-routed. To avoid inadvertent harm to rare plants, all active management of rare plant populations (including invasive species removal) should be planned in consultation with the Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program.